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THE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM, CLARK COUNTY, INDIANA

By MRS. ELINOR H. CAMPBELL, Jeffersonville, Indiana

On record in the courthouse of this county appears the following:

W. C. Greenup, surveyor of town of Bethlehem, Clark county, Indiana Territory. William Plasket this day personally appeared before me, James McCampbell, one of the justices assigned to keep the peace and made oath that this is the original plat or map of the Town of Bethlehem in the county and territory aforesaid.

Given under my hand and seal this 15th day of June, 1812.

JAMES MCCAMPBELL, J.P.C.C.

At that time we know the ground on which this town stands was owned by Jonathan Clark, Col. John Armstrong, William Plasket, and others. As Col. Armstrong was born in the town of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, this town was probably named in honor of his birthplace.

The plat shows that the streets running parallel with the river were called Front, Second, and Third, while those at right angles with these were Poplar, Walnut, Main, Bell and Sycamore, embracing sixteen full squares and a half square beyond the two on the east side of Bell street, with the half square between Walnut and Main on Second street reserved for public ground.

In the country round about were then living the following families, whose names appear in county commissioners' reports in connection with opening of roads, etc.

The name of Abbott is seen on record in 1779. The heirs of John Rodgers are mentioned in 1806. Philip Boyer from near Lexington, Kentucky, William Kelly, born in Virginia, later of Kentucky, came to this county in 1806. William Hamilton, with his mother and two sisters, came in 1812. Jacob Hiltner, born in Northumberland county, Pennsylvania, emigrated to Kentucky and then to Clark county, Indiana, several years before the birth of his son George in 1818. Near New Washington were the Adams, Dougan, Provine, Fouts, Montgomery and other families.

Of William Provine it is recorded that because his mill was the only one on this side of the river he was twice returned from service during the War of 1812.

One of the first purchasers of a lot in the town was Bayley Johnson, who for a lot centrally located paid ten dollars. Persons named Olmstead, Belden, Sturdivant, Maston, Stephenson, Barnes, Rae, Gardner, Smock, Cravens, Robinson and Goforth were owners of lots in the early years, while William Plasket and William G. Armstrong seemed to have been the leading business men of the town. The two latter operated the ferry, being taxed six dollars for the privilege in 1816. These men were also partners in general merchandise business, occupying the large corner room of the two-story building which Mr. Armstrong erected on the corner of Front and Bell streets. In connection with the store room was his dwelling, and a continuous row of two-story buildings extended from the corner building to the alley below. These buildings were destroyed by fire early in '59.

Mr. Plasket put up the large two-story brick house on the other front corner of the same block. We find record of Henry Fix purchasing in the town in the year 1820, P. R. Baldwin in 1840. Mr. Emanuel Pernet purchased in 1848 the corner property from William G. Armstrong, while Thomas Wallace the following year purchased from Mr. Armstrong the farm above the creek.

Associated with every name here mentioned (save a very few of the first comers) are personal memories very dear and tender, the Plaskets and Armstrongs being relatives of my father and others acquaintances of my youth. When the "War" commenced our good people had an immense flag flung to the breeze from a sixty-foot pole, the ceremony made most impressive by the reading of the constitution, speeches, and music, and on this day in June, 1861, the greatest crowd of people ever seen in Bethlehem gathered on the public ground. Our young men went to battle for the "Union"—many never to return—and at home all felt the effects of the War in one way or another.

Uncle Tommy Rogers could get no help in planting corn and was glad to accept the proffered service of two little girls, who for two days trudged between the furrows dropping the grains in each proper place. When the eighteen-inch snow covered the ground in the winter of '62 the physician from New Washington was sent for

and the little child born that night was soon left motherless, while the father was in the army.

The excitement attending the Morgan Raid can never be forgotten by all who lived here in July, 1863. The fright was just as great as had the intelligence been true that Morgan's men were coming on the road from New Washington, but luckily it was a company of Home Guards instead. At that time mail was received but three times in the week and daily papers were thrown from the passing mail boat, being picked up by some one in a skiff and then from the corner stone read aloud to the interested listeners who were eager to hear the War news.

On a sad day in April, 1865, as the boat was landing to take on passengers my father asked why the flag was at half mast and the reply was "for the President." Stunned by the answer, we though not to say "good bye" to some departing relatives but sadly picked up the paper that was thrown down. The day was dark and gloomy and our hearts were filled with sorrow because of the fearful news.

In retrospect let us try to imagine something of the days as they were one hundred years ago. The river flowed by this high bank then as now but only keelboats, barges and pirogues plied the waters. Forests covered most of the ground and wolves prowled through them still. The county was paying a bounty of \$1.00 for each wolf head. It was not until 1815 that any systematic method of opening roads was inaugurated and of course there were no bridges.

The housekeeping was such as we imagine existed in all primitive homes, but when in 1815 Mr. Armstrong brought his bride from Cincinnati he must have also brought many of the conveniences and comforts to which she was accustomed. In 1819 a trip to Cincinnati was made—Mrs. Armstrong carrying her baby on her lap as she rode horseback.

It is well for us to look back at our beginnings and, in so recalling the days and ways of our ancestors, pay homage to their memory and resolve to make of our lives the best record possible.